

"The Queen's Closet Opened"

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“ THE QUEEN’S CLOSET OPENED.” *

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THE title of this volume easily lends itself to fancy, and brings up a vision of a half-open door through which come glimpses of gorgeous robes, and flitting in and out are dainty ladies-in-waiting, fetching silks and satins, velvets and laces, jewels and ermine, with which to deck a daintier queen.

Truth confirms fancy in one point, for this “ Queen ” was dainty. She was petite, and she was beautiful, fair of face and with curling hair, graceful and with charming manner, and she possessed a wonderful voice and sang most admirably. She was Henrietta Maria, daughter of Henry IV of France, and sister of Louis XIII, who, at the age of eighteen, became the queen of Charles I. Her royal husband loved her devotedly, and among her household were some who remained strongly attached to her even after her youth and inexperience had led her into errors disastrous to the king, and compelled her to flee to her own country. The compiler of the little book before me was probably one of these.

The first edition appeared in 1656, and its preface states that these receipts were originally collected for her “ distressed Sovereign Majesty the Queen ”; that they had been “ laid at her feet by Persons of Honour and Quality ”; and that the compiler, who “ fell with the Court ” when the

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queen fled to France, gave these receipts in print to her friends as a reminder of their absent queen, and as a satisfaction to himself since he could no longer render her any other service. He signs himself "W. M.," but his identity remains a mystery. The preface of the second edition, addressed "To the Ingenious and Courteous Reader," calls attention to the benefit received by many from these receipts, and to the esteem in which the book has been held by all who bought it, and that they cannot "chuse but . . . give it a new Birth." The compiler here mentions that the book is "not without its Variety; here preserving the Fruits of the Earth with such a curious neatness, as if it would show that though Summer gave those pleasant Fruits, yet that Art is able to make Winter richer than herself."

The book is in three parts, the first called "The Queen's Closet Opened"; the second, "The Queen's Delight"; and the third, "The Compleat Cook." Mrs. Alice Morse Earle, in her book called "Customs and Fashions," makes copious mention of "The Queen's Closet" in a chapter called "Doctors and Patients," and I am greatly in debt to this chapter for much information and suggestion. I know of but one other mention of it: Agnes Strickland, the historian, states that copies of the volume are exceedingly rare in England, but a few are to be found here and there through New England. The one belonging to the Treadwell Library came with the collection of books given by Dr. Treadwell, of Salem, Mass., which collection formed the nucleus of the Library. On the last page, written at the bottom, and upside down, is the name of Sarah Bruce, probably once its owner. It is the second edition, "corrected and revised, with many new and large Additions," and was printed in 1671. It must have done

faithful duty in its day, for one cover is gone, the other much worn, and its back is broken. Looked at from without, it has rather a dejected air, but one glance within will court another, and prove that its contents are well worth a brief consideration.

This combination of leechcraft and cooking was not at all uncommon in early days; a large number of cook-books of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were written by physicians. In fact, it was necessary for a physician to be a good cook, for did he not have to brew his own concoctions?

The first part, called "The Queen's Closet," contains many strange and curious remedies, largely for the diseases of the day, and they were contributed by kings and queens, lords, ladies and bishops, the Lord Mayor, and the Lord Treasurer, to say nothing of noted physicians and surgeons. There are many cures for the plague, which several times during this particular century raged in London. Here is one, called "A Drink to drive the Plague from the Heart."

"Take a great Onion, cut off the top of it, and take out so much of the core as the bigness of a walnut, which hole fill up with Treacle, put on the top again and wrap the Onion in a piece of brown or gray paper, rost it throughly, and peel it, and trim it finely, and put it in a clean linnen cloth, and strain it hard into three porringers, and drink the juyce so strained out: For it hath been found most excellent by often proof, not only for the expulsion of the Plague, but also the eradicating of all poison and Venome."

There is "Dr. Read's Perfume to smell against the Plague", and there is another "Perfume against the Plague" which is "to burn Tar every morning in a chafing-dish of coals." Numerous

remedies for smallpox appear, and for the "collick"; there are directions how "to chear the heart," "melancholly to suppress," and the "heart's passion to take away." The cures for consumption, in the light of twentieth century treatment, are most interesting. There is "a special Water for a Consumption," the groundwork of which consists of "a peck of Garden shell snails washed in small Beer, put into a great Iron dripping pan, and set on the hot fire of Charcoals, and kept constantly stirred till they make no noise at all"; then other equally interesting ingredients are added, and finally, three gallons of strong ale are poured on, and the result is distilled and put away in "close Glasses." The patient must take six spoonfuls of this every morning fasting, and not sleep after it, and must continue to fast for two hours subsequent to the dose. It must have been a difficult matter to keep awake after this, even though taken early in the morning. Another more precious remedy is called "Dr. Gifford's Amber Pills for a Consumption," for into this are mixed "powders of Pearl, White Amber, and Coral, of each a quantity." It is noticeable that measures are not always made with exceeding accuracy, nor administered with exactness; as, for instance, "a good draught", "a pretty draught", "as much as will lie upon the point of a knife", "one little handful", "as much as a walnut", "as much as half a nut at once, at your pleasure", "the weight of three barley corns", "the weight of sixpence", "as much as will lie upon a shilling". Time will not permit the quotation of many of these receipts, but one or two of the shorter ones will be interesting. Here is something "For one that hath no Speech in Sickness.

"Take the juyce of Sage, or Pimpernel, and

put it in the Patient's mouth, and by the grace of God it shall make him speak."

And here is "An Electuary for the Passion of the Heart.

"Take Damask Roses half blown, cut off their whites, and stamp them very fine, and strain out the juyce very strong; moisten it in the stamping with a little Damask Rosewater, then put thereto fine powder Sugar, and boyl it gently to a thin Syrup; then take the powders of Amber, Pearl, and Rubies, of each half a dram, Ambergreece one scruple, and mingle them with the said Syrup till it be somewhat thick, and take a little thereof on a knives point morning and evening."

This is another instance of the use of jewels as a compound. Frequent mention of them is found, and gold was also used. It is likely that the poor had to be supplied with less expensive cures for their ailments.

You may learn here "To make Golden letters without gold", and "To make Silver letters without silver". If you are suffering from insomnia,

"Bruise a handful of Anniseeds, and steep them in red Rose-water, and make it up in little bags, and bind one of them to each nostril, and it will cause sleep."

If you would "make your Face fair",

"Take fresh Bean-blossoms, and distil them in a Limbeck, and with the water wash your face."

The second part of this book is called "A Queen's Delight, or, the Art of Preserving, Conserving and Candyng. As also a right Knowledge of making Perfumes, and Distilling the most Excellent Waters." It is divided into eight parts: the first, called Preserving, is devoted, as stated in the preface, to shewing that "Art is

able to make Winter richer than herself," for the housewife may learn such secrets as will enable her to keep fresh all sorts of fruits, from green walnuts and apricoks to plums, grapes and quinces; she may make syrups both bitter and sweet; and perfumes to put among her linen; and wines to put away "close stopped in glass pottles." Here is a rule for a "Conserve of Rosemary flowers after the Italian manner.

"Take new Rosemary Flowers one pound, of white sugar one pound; so beat them together in a Marble Mortar with a wooden Pestle, keep it in a galli-pot, or vessel of earth well glassed, or in one of hard stone. It may be preserved for one year or two.

"The Vertues: It comforteth the heart, the brain, and all the nervous part of the Body."

In view of said "vertues," let all librarians give this a trial.

The second division is sweet with Candies, candies made for the most part of all kinds of flowers, from violets to peonies. These are dried in the oven, then pounded to a powder, and mixed into a clear syrup, which is allowed to cool and harden. The third division is Marmalets and Quiddony; the fourth, Pastry and Pasties; the fifth, Pomanders; the sixth, Wine; and the seventh, "Choice Secrets made known." Here you may discover the mysteries of Queen Elizabeth's perfume, and the compounding of a famous dentifrice popular with the royal household, which, if it be desired red, has mixed with it a pound of powdered brick, but if white, then a pound of powdered alabaster. We find here "A water for a consumption, or for a Brain that is weak." The cure for one apparently served equally well for the other. Then there is "Water of Time for the Passion of the Heart." This

seems to have been a condition sufficiently serious to require special prescription. Let us hope that the white wine and sack, the cloves, mace, ginger, and grains of Paradise served to quell the wild beatings and heart tumults of the day. Black hair must have been a fashion of the time, for here is a compound "to make hair grow black, though any color." If you would write letters of secret,

"Take fine Allum, beat it small, and put a reasonable quantity of it into water, then write with said water.

"The work cannot be read, but by steeping your paper in fair running water.

"You may likewise write with Vinegar, or the juyce of Lemon or Onion; if you would read the same, you must hold it before the fire."

The eighth division is called Distillings, from which I quote one rule for "Pain in the Head."

"Take Marigold flowers, and distill them, then take a fine cloth and wet in the aforesaid water, and so lay it to the forehead of the Patient, and being so applied let him sleep if he can; this with God's help will cease the pain."

The last part of this little old book is called "The Compleat Cook," and here are indeed dishes "fit to set before the King." I find no pies made of blackbirds, but a receipt containing twelve larks and four young chickens, not to mention many other tempting ingredients, sounds quite equal to it, and surely would grace a royal banquet.

Let your eye run down the columns of the index, and you will find dishes suitable for all times of the year. In January, learn to make Creame with Snow; in February, perhaps you might try a Steak-pye with a French pudding in the pye; in March, you must have a Marchpane, iced and

gilded, and garnished according to Art. In April, make a Gooseberry Fool, and make scalding Cheese towards the latter end of May; in June, you would relish Lozenges of Red Roses; and in July, a Cherry Cordial. In August, you may like to boyl a Pike and an Eele together; and in September, the first month with an "r," you will rejoice to roast oysters. In October, make a Partridge Tart; and in November, for your Thanksgiving dinner, have a dressed Pike, a roast Fillet of Beef, a fat Lamb made of a Pig, a Pidgeon pye, a Sallet of a cold Hen or a Capon, and all washed down with the Ale of Health and Strength, or a Cordial Water of Sir Walter Raleigh; and then a Pumpion pye for dessert. And last of all, in December, you must make your minced pyes for Christmas.

And now, at the end, I can do no better than quote the motto which is found at the bottom of the title-page of this little volume: "*Vivit post funera virtus.*" It may have been intended for the gracious queen herself, but at least some of the "vertues" contained in these pages live to-day.

SAMUEL USHER, BOSTON